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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 003718

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: AOUN ADVISOR WARNS "THEY'RE OUT OF TIME"

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C/NF) Gibran Bassil, senior advisor to Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, recited a litany of grievances against the Siniora government and warned that negotiations and compromise were no longer possible between the Hizballah/FPM alliance and March 14 forces. He indicated that joint Hizballah/FPM street demonstrations were imminent and predicted they would not end until the Siniora government had fallen. Bassil's constant references to the "threat" posed by Samir Ja'ja's Lebanese Forces may presage an attempt to blame LF for any violence that may occur. When asked whether FPM really wants to go down this dangerous path and likely incur responsibility, Bassil petulantly argued that any violence would be the sole responsibility of Saad Hariri and Siniora for their "greedy" refusal to share power. Bassil said that the four ministries offered by Siniora and March 14 were not enough. End summary.

¶2. (C/NF) Bassil met with emboff on November 28 at his residence in Rabieh. The influential senior advisor (and son-in-law) to Michel Aoun was agitated and stated early on in the conversation that he was at high personal risk and was no longer living in Rabieh. He pointedly inquired whether the Embassy was aware that up to 40 armed members of the Lebanese Forces had been arrested the previous evening for engaging in unauthorized military training. Without explaining his reasoning, he predicted the Lebanese Forces would soon be involved in violent activity.

HARIRI EXCORIATED

¶3. (C/NF) Bassil, who has long argued the benefits of the Hizballah-FPM political alliance as a justifiable counter-weight to the March 14 coalition, insisted that the time for possible compromise was now over and indicated that an all-out push would soon commence to bring down the Siniora government. Bassil expounded a long list of grievances, mainly featuring Saad Hariri, whom he described as an inept, duplicitous opportunist who cared little for Lebanon. Although the most heated language was reserved for Hariri ("...all he's ever wanted was the tribunal, as if he's the only one who has ever suffered in Lebanon..."), Bassil also levied heavy criticism on Siniora for his purported refusal to listen to anyone except his tight circle of "Sunni advisors." He also issued a dismissive rebuke of Hariri's political skill by confiding that Hassan Nasrallah had said

that Hariri had "begged" Nasrallah for a meeting immediately following the assassination of Pierre Gemayel, strongly implying that he was not a worthy adversary.

¶4. (C/NF) Throughout the discussion, Bassil gave the impression that FPM and Hizballah have closely coordinated their planning and would be following a joint script once the demonstrations commenced. He tried to portray the cohorts of Hizballah as Lebanese patriots, who would only engage in disciplined, peaceful protest. When Bassil was asked what would happen if the authorities simply permitted peaceful demonstrations and the government continued to operate as it has been, Bassil expressed disdain for the implied naivete of the question and stated that, with the Lebanese Forces in the equation, a peaceful resolution of the crisis was not a possibility.

¶5. (C/NF) For the better part of an hour, Bassil recounted episode upon episode, many from years past, that supposedly proved the deceit of the country's Sunni "ruling class" and their unjustified dominance of Lebanon's political and economic structures. He stated that Michel Aoun, upon his return to Lebanon last year, had tried to "share his rightful claim" to power, but had been repeatedly rebuffed by the troika of Hariri, Ja'ja' and Jumblatt. He even made the rather astonishing claim that the alleged decision by the family of slain Pierre Gemayel not to receive him as a mourner was politically inspired and further proof of their "hatred" toward the former general.

¶6. (C/NF) Bassil made it clear that Michel Aoun now believes the time has come to settle old scores with the Hariri family, Samir Ja'ja' and Walid Jumblatt. Throughout the discussion, the mixture of bravado and arrogance made

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Bassil incapable of answering even the most basic question of why would Aoun join forces with an organization so clearly under the control of Syria and Iran. And when pressed to explain why Aoun would set in motion a process that could harm so many people and jeopardize the sovereignty of his country, Bassil simply retorted, "Ask Saad -- that is where the responsibility lies." When asked why Aoun had rebuffed Siniora's offer to give Aoun four ministries (including one of the most powerful and prestigious slots), Bassil answered, revealingly, that "we" have 44 percent of the parliament and thus must have 44 percent of the cabinet -- "we" in this case being Aoun, Hizballah, and Amal combined.

COMMENT

¶7. (C/NF) If Bassil is any indication -- and although he is a blustery character, he has proven to be very influential in the Aounist movement -- we will soon face a coordinated effort by FPM and Hizballah to topple the Siniora government and punish the many perceived demons who inhabit the Aounist psyche. But probably more disconcerting than the almost juvenile expression of political grudges was the insouciance with which Bassil reflected on possible violence. And unless he was purposefully misleading for some unfathomable reason, FPM already has the villain of the piece -- and he is Samir Ja'ja'. While we agree that we need to watch the Lebanese Forces carefully for signs of renewed militia activity, we are more bothered that Bassil's hatred of March 14 has led him to see the FPM and Hizballah as comrades in arms in a joint struggle.

¶8. (C/NF) Whatever Bassil's comments, Aoun himself always rejects the label that he is an "ally" of Hizballah. But his rejection of Siniora's offer for four ministries in a 30-member cabinet indicates how much Aoun has bought into the Hizballah enterprise: Aoun does not ask for additional ministries for himself but parrots Hizballah's insistence on the formula of one-third-plus-one of the total cabinet that would give him, Hizballah and Amal together the ability to

block everything the cabinet does and to threaten the cabinet with constitutional collapse at any moment. If Aoun wanted to prove that he can be a constructive force, he would call Siniora immediately to say that he accepts the formula of four ministries in a 30-member cabinet, without reference to the Hizballah demands. End comment.

FELTMAN